

MYANMAR

N E W S U P D A T E

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China urges Myanmar to pursue “democracy process”

China urged troubled Myanmar to press forward with a “democracy process that is appropriate for the country”, cautiously adding its weight to international pressure on the Southeast Asian junta to defuse public unrest.

Senior Chinese diplomat Tang Jiaxuan made the comments to Myanmar Foreign Minister U Nyan Win, who was visiting Beijing for talks on Thursday, the official Xinhua news agency reported.

Since August, Myanmar, formerly called Burma, has sought to stamp out public protests sparked by fuel price rises but reflecting frustration at the military's harsh rule. Early this month, the junta completed the first stage of drawing up a new constitution but left unclear when and how it will allow the document to be written.

Domestic critics of the generals who have ruled the poor Southeast Asian country for 45 years, as well as Washington and Brussels, have called the process a sham and a distraction from engaging the democratic opposition forces.

But China backed the process as a way of defusing volatile tensions.

“China whole-heartedly hopes that Myanmar will push forward a democracy process that is appropriate for the country,” Tang told the minister, according to Xinhua on Friday (Sept 14).

Reuters – Sept 14

UNHCR, India suspends registration of new comers from Burma

The office of the UNHCR in New Delhi, India yesterday announced the indefinite suspension of registration for new comers from Burma. The decision takes affect from today (Sept 18)

The reason for the suspension has to do with the increasing number of new comers from Burma and the backlog which needs to be cleared by the UNHCR office in New Delhi. This is delaying the registration of Burmese people who seek refugee status.

The UNHCR notification said it would try to clear the backlog before the end of November, 2007. However, the UNHCR office did not mention the date of reopening registrations for newly arrived people from Burma.

The inefficiency of staff members in the office has held up the process of interviewing and decision making for granting refugee status, said Margarita Vargav, legal officer of the UNHCR office in New Delhi, at an open house meeting for Burmese refugees held in August.

“I agree with the decision of the UNHCR as there are a lot of cases still remaining to be dealt with. Some people have been waiting for two to three years,” said Jeremiah Lishang Chuiha, president of the Chin Refugees Committee (CRC) in New Delhi.

“The UNHCR office also assured intervention or necessary action in case of deportation of Burmese by Indian authorities, he added.

Khonumthung News – Sept 18

Myanmar junta admits used tear gas, warning shots

Myanmar's military junta said on Wednesday (19 Sept) it had used tear gas and fired warning shots to disperse a crowd of 1,000 Buddhist monks and civilians protesting in the northwestern coastal city of Sittwe.

The admission on state-owned MRTV and in official newspapers was a thinly veiled warning to the former Burma's 53 million people after a month of protests against decades of military rule and soaring fuel and food prices.

The increasing involvement of monks, key players in a 1988 mass uprising, is a sign the dissent that broke out last month over shock fuel price rises is intensifying.

Throughout four weeks of sporadic demonstrations, the military has been at pains to keep itself in the background, although soldiers did fire warning shots at one monk protest in the central town of Pakokku two weeks ago.

Instead of troops, the generals have favored civilian gangs and members of its feared USDA social network.

Reuters – Aung Hla Tun - Sept 19

Myanmar protests “just the start” - top dissident

Nearly four weeks of protests in Myanmar are “just the start” of a mass movement against the ruling junta and the grinding poverty endured by the former Burma's 53 million people, a top activist said from hiding.

“There is no way this will stop,” Htay Kywe told Reuters from a secret location inside Myanmar, where he has been in hiding since evading an Aug. 21 crackdown on dissidents who launched a rare string of protests against shock increases of fuel prices.

“Arresting and killing people will not free us from economic hardship,” the 39-year-old said in digitally recorded answers to questions e-mailed by Reuters and authenticated by a person known to be a very close friend.

Thirteen of Htay Kywe's colleagues in the “88 Generation Students Group” that spearheaded a nationwide uprising against military rule in 1988 have been arrested and accused of terrorism, charges that could see them jailed for decades.

But Htay Kywe, who managed to elude midnight raids on homes across Yangon, said the generals who have run the Southeast Asian nation for the last 45 years would never be able to cover up the reality of deepening poverty.

Reuters – Ed Cropley – Sept 13

Burmese junta orders state emergency, authorizes use of weapons, says source

The Burmese military government has ordered a state of emergency authorizing regional and local authorities to control demonstrations, including an order to open fire on protesters if necessary, according to sources.

The government secretly conveyed the emergency order to the military, local police and special branch authorities, a source close to local authorities and ethnic ceasefire groups told The Irrawaddy on Wednesday (Sept. 19).

Police officials in Naypyidaw, the regime's new capital, issued a state of emergency order to local police on September 6, said the source.

The military and police have been told to prepare for any eventuality and to stockpile weapons, loudspeakers, cameras, barbed wire, bullet proof jackets, red and blue colored scarves, medical supplies and other equipment. Hospitals have been told to prepare for large numbers of injured persons, according to sources.

Irrawaddy – Shah Paung – Sept 19

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